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ABSTRACT

The role of women in a society changing from industrial to service orientation is examined. It is pointed out that women are uniquely qualified to be leaders in a society whose highest ideals are cooperation, conservation, equality, respect for others, and compassion. The suggestion is made that the educational system be equipped to train children of both sexes to develop a spirit of cooperation underlining constructive action and realization of the needs of others. (JD)

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WOMEN AND THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

Audrey C. Cohen

The decade of the seventies has two major hallmarks: scepticism about the value of traditional education as a means of preparing the young for the real world of work, and the emergence of women from their traditional domestic roles, and from occupations reflecting these roles, into new arenas of activity in the professions, business, politics, and even manual labor. Both of these trends are taking place within an economy which is shifting from production of goods to production of services, and this has important implications for the direction in which both education, work and women's liberation must go. The movement of women out of stereotypic and restrictive roles, and the increasing focus on making education responsive to the real needs of young people are two interrelated manifestations of social change in a world where improving the quality of life is replacing industrial expansion as a priority.

We are already living in a service society. For the past two hundred years the farm sector of the economy has been losing one half of one percent of its labor force to the manufacturing and service sectors. The growth curve now shows movement away from manufacturing into service, with over two-thirds of the work force now engaged in service occupations. By the year 2,000 estimates suggest this figure will rise to 80% of the work force.

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Within this service sector, more and more emphasis is being directed to "human services", especially teaching, counseling and work with the handicapped and disadvantaged, service directly affecting the quality of life. At the same time people are demanding better service and are refusing to pay for service they do not receive. Service providers are being held accountable for poor performance, with law suits instituted against those who do not perform. People are beginning to be concerned not only with technical skill but with the attitude of service providers. Criticism is increasingly voiced at inhumane treatment by social workers, teachers and even heretofore sacrosanct, doctors. The new era of service is giving rise to new social ethics.

The competitive ethic of the past, the ethic which fueled and supported the industrial revolution and rewarded the ruthless, independent entrepeneur is dead or dying. This ethic has little part to play in a society based on services. Personal gain and self-aggrandizement are not part of the service ethic. The over-riding goal of a service society is to make life better for everyone. This presupposes a spirit of cooperation, a sense of "community", for it is in the local community that possibilities for a decent environment, better education, improved recreational opportunities are most likely to be realized. It is within a local community that most of us will spend our lives. This sense of community, this sense of cooperation, rather than unadulterated individualism, this new service ethic has enormous implications for women, as I will show later. It would permit them to capitalize on skills and qualities in which they have been trained, qualities which are critical for the service society, and essential to foster in both men and women, if service to others is going to be the mainspring of society and positions of power are to be used to improve the human condition, not as springboards for personal gain.

Education for Service

Education seems to have taken little cognizance of these developments. What kinds of changes must be instituted to imbue our educational system with a service ethic and to prepare youngsters for a world in which service is dominant? To begin to answer such a question, let us look at the the constants that underlie all effective service, no matter what the specific area or situation. I term these constants the "dimensions" of service. There are five of them: a sense of purpose; the values one acts on; understanding of ourselves as individuals and understanding of the systems that affect our lives; and mastery of the diverse skills we need to insure productive lives for ourselves. Let us put these dimensions into a practical context. An individual oriented towards service approaches every situation with a specific social purpose, with a senstive and persistent attention to humane values, with a knowledgeable understanding of self and others, and of the numerous systems that impact on our lives. Such an individual has learned to use the various and complex skills that mastery of these areas involves. As one looks at these dimensions more closely, it becomes clearer why they are central to effective education. Purpose goes to heart of service that works, just at it is at the heart of effective education. Like human service in general, education has as its purpose to induce positive changes in the lives of others. If a service ethic permeated education, the purpose would be expanded. It would mean using all the resources learned through education to the higher purpose of helping others change their lives for the better, and most important, teaching others, so that they are empowered to manage their own lives to the greatest extent possible. Thus as educated people move out into the world, they will take this ethic with them. They, as well as the people they help, will be able to fulfill their potential as responsible and creative members of society.

What kind of values does the service ethic mandate? In order to help people become empowered, one must believe they are capable of managing their own lives. They must be respected as equals and engaged as partners in any helping process. Changing another person's life for the better must be a cooperative process between the person in need and the person who is the helper. American education has been caught between two extreme points of view with regard to values. On the one hand there are those who argue that truth, especially scientific truth, is value free and neutral, and that experts can be trained to solve complex social problems on the basis of facts alone. On the other hand, wherever we look, nationally, statewide or locally, it is abundantly evident that this is not the case, that new problems arise because we refuse to admit that our actions are expressions of values. In terms of service, the necessary values are clear and must be reflected in our education: the dignity and inviolability of the individual; the importance of social relationships; the capacity of all people for growth. Essential also is the value of change...the possibility of bringing about alterations in persons and in systems that benefit both an individual and society as a whole.

Self and others is closely related to values. What assumptions about ourselves and about other persons do we bring to situations? Are these, in fact, valid? Are they in conflict with those of the other person involved in the situation? Can perceptions and conflicts about oneself and about others with whom one is involved be clarified, compromised and brought into harmony? These kinds of issues are critical in service. They ought to be critical in education.

At every level of our existence, from home, to community to place of work, we are confronted with systems. To understand what systems come into play in particular instances -- how systems would allow us to grow, how systems would allow us to help others for example -- to know how to utilize

these systems, to negotiate them, and, finally, to teach others to do the same, are all part of effective living.

Obviously, service to others calls upon a myriad of skills: problem solving skills, diagnosis and assessment skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, research skills. An educational system that focuses on all the skills that empowerment entails has far greater potential than the system to which we are now bound.

Relationship of Dimensions to Bodies of Knowledge

At any level of education we can use these dimensions to bring into focus the essential areas of knowledge which are part of the educational program. The dimensions provide an interdisciplinary matrix for education aimed at practical applications. For example the last three dimensions, -- self and others, systems and skills, represent in large measure the social science content of a curriculum, whether this be elementary school, high school, college, or post graduate education. Material from psychology, sociology, economics, mathematics, for example, can be brought together under these dimensions. As a result this material begins to have practical meaning in an individual's life. How much greater is the value of learning when even the more abstract, intellectual principles can be applied to real life.

The other two dimensions, purpose and values, also incorporate critical areas of learning. They draw together the disciplines which give meaning to the social sciences, including political and social philosophy and ethics. They bring to the fore the purpose of the service performed and the values which inform it. Even in earlies education, such awareness ought to permeate what is taught and how it is taught. Since purpose is at the heart of service, youngsters, adolescents and adults must learn how to choose appropriate purposes, purposes which, given a particular time, place, situation and resources -- are right for the citizen as well as the

practitioner. And these purposes must be in harmony both with the values of the service practitioner and the service recipient. This very lack of harmony is only too obvious in the dysfunctional service systems which characterize our society today. It is these two dimensions that are of greatest concern to humanistic educators.

Implications of Service Ethic for Education

From the foregoing it can be seen that what I am proposing, is an overall model of education whose principles can permeate learning from kindergarten through graduate school and underlie the kind of education that is accountable for achieving results. Such an education is based on the purpose of empowering the citizenry so that all of us can move toward self-sufficiency and the realization of our potential. Such an education is performance-oriented and performance-assessed. It actively involves people and the world outside the schoolroom. It imbues education with a new standard of productivity.

Service means purpose beyond oneself. It signifies an ethic where caring values are central. These caring values will influence the nature of our lives when work with others is the prime occupation of the labor force. Values that enhance such work include, compassion, empathy, human fullfillment, sensitivity. Power and money will be replaced as a paramount concern by sensitivity to and compassion for one another, for these are the values central to a service ethic. Improving the life of others, as well as improving the quality of one's own life, is the ideal in a service society. American education should prepare people for both work and leisure, prepare them to live in a humane and caring society, and prepare them for useful and satisfying work in a service society in which they will know that there is equity for all.

Through the incorporation of these values into the education system

young people will learn that to care about other human beings is important and satisfying...that their lives will in all likelihood involve working with others...that rewards will come because they do a good job for others. This is the antithesis of the current social ethic which stresses individualism and self-interest. The extremes of self-interest, and even hedonism, which prevail today are inappropriate to a service ethic. If we continue to travel that old road, the end result will be a fragmented, self-serving, self-destructing society.

To achieve the new service ideal, education should be organized around major areas of activity that relate to and are important to how we will be spending our lives. In a service society, for example, much work will involve group activities. It would be useful for a young person not just to comprehend the theoretical concept that working with a group has a positive value, but to begin to see how one could strengthen one's real ability to accomplish purposes by knowing how to work effectively in a group. Thus, if theory from psychology, anthropology, history, literature, were brought together and studied in relationship to actual purposeful activity that helped a student understand how to work effectively in a group, learning would be accelerated and personal accomplishment would be achieved.

At each level of a child's development, the comprehensive areas that must be mastered, will, or course, be different, and they will become more complex. However, young people will learn from the start that it is their ability to effect positive changes in the human condition that is the core of their purpose in learning and this is as true for technical and vocational education as it is for service. To test for accomplishment in an education structured in this mode, we need a test that enables us to see how successful we are in achieving our purpose. The continuously applied criteria

that will determine the success of the educational experiences is the utilization by a youngster of multiple skills and theory to help others become self-sufficient. I have termed this the "constructive action" process.

A constructive action is the practical effort to apply knowledge towards the empowerment of one or more citizens outside the classroom. It is an actual project or piece of service delivery that results in positive change. It is a specific example of service performance planned, carried out and systematically evaluated within a definite time frame. As the context for learning, the constructive action compels the transformation of theoretical knowledge into practical use in helping others. As the context for assessment, the constructive action ties academic success to performance accountability. Thus, when the young child is learning to read or to write, the performance of a constructive action ties these skills into the world in which he/she lives by asking for immediate practical applications.

This holistic approach is just what present education lacks. It rarely, if ever, allows us to see the usefulness of the humanities and the liberal arts in real life, to cite only two examples. Thus, education -- those enormous blocks of time we spend in classrooms throughout our formative years -- can largely be termed a wasted effort as far as its influence on what we do in and with our lives. It does not create a sense of lifelong learning. It does not impart a conviction that knowledge can be a support to one's actions in life. Consider the alternative, however. A model grounded in a well defined purpose, supported by the service ethic, and with knowledge reorganized around the dimensions which permeate society, can move to rectify the glaring inadequacies of current education.

The Service Ethic in Elementary Education

Even at an early age, children can begin to develop a strong sense of community and caring about others. They can learn what helping others really involves. Simple projects that would normally be considered as self-contained activities can take on a new meaning if they are ongoing, tangible evidence of service that affects people's lives indefinitely. Such undertakings involve almost every aspect of academic study put to immediate and practical use. Seen from the perspective of a lifetime of learning to support one's community and the quality of life in that community, these activities -- and even in the earliest grades they can be defined as constructive actions -- become part of a large purposeful context where cooperation, unselfishness, service to others are paramount and are the basis for rewards. A "clean block" or "clean park" campaign, for example, organized by children and involving every group in the neighborhood, would not be a one-time experience, but something to be continued and valued for it affects the quality of community life -- increases pride in a neighborhood, pleasure to be gained from its park. This never stops.

As the child progresses through the schooling process, his or her capacity for learning increases and becomes more sophisticated. So, too, the ability to use theory for societal improvement. Thus, perhaps, a fourth or fifth grade child might apply learning to planning and building a small dam for water power, understanding the changes this could bring about in an isolated, rural community. This might be done as a group and involve sharing roles in planning, development, construction and evalutaion. It means applying math, writing up analyses, learning the rudiments of drafting and so on. It also gives the child or group of children strong feelings of satisfaction, about being really able to do something to directly benefit people as a result of the schooling experience.

As children grow, the political arena might offer many opportunities for constructive actions. So might the social service agencies within the

communities. An interesting piece of research illustrated, for example, that children who tutored peers not only had the satisfaction of seeing those peers' performance improve, but also saw surprising results in great improvements in their own skills. Theory combined with practice is an exciting way to promote real learning.

Throughout the constructive action assessment process, one point remains central and paramount. Students will always be assessed on the impact their constructive actions have on the people with whom the individual works. The constructive actions themselves will be grounded in purpose directly related to actual needs. These are not hypothetical activities -- the "projects" that characterized progressive education. The constructive action is holistic, directed towards a real purpose, involving mastery of broad areas of knowledge as well as the dimensions, and predicated on improving the lives of indviduals or groups. The constructive action is assessed in these same terms.

The Professions

The model of education just described in a kindergarten through college framework, also has practical applications in professional education. Applied in medical schools, it might eliminate the problem of the doctor who stands at the foot of the sick person's bed and talks across that person to the nurse, as if the bed were occupied by a retail store mannequin. Medical schools are already beginning to see the necessity for a better educated doctor who knows something about humanistic ethics (not just medical ethics) and understands how the humanities relate to his/her work. Constructive actions as the focus for medical school education and internship practice would be a logical improvement over the fragmented tour-of-duty method currently in vogue. A constructive action could result from each aspect of medical education, and thus bring the student-physician into hospitals and clinics much sooner than is presently the case. It would help students still in the early stages of medical education

to evaluate themselves and to ask an important question: "Am I really going to make a good doctor?" This question is too often asked too late, when the answer is moot because the commitment in time and money dictates a continuation regardless.

The medical student undertaking a constructive action might deal with one patient, or with a group. S/he might help them to achieve not merely the alleviation of illness, but also a set of goals to maintain good health. This would logically lead to the question of how to go about such maintenance, and would result in the planning in cooperation with the patient(s) of appropriate strategies. Assessing the value of this approach would mean determining how effectively the patient was then able to focus on prevention or recurrence of illness.

The same process could be used in legal education. One constructive action in law school, for example, could deal with the design and organization of a corporate entity. The would-be attorney would have to be competent to deal with all the legal issues that might come into play -- the processes for incorporation, applicable tax law, real estate codes, the law of contracts and so on -- and relate them to ethical concerns. The study of law would be as inter-disciplinary as its practice. For each constructive action -- and there would be one for each area of legal competence -- material would be pulled together from various strands of legal practice and organized around the dimensions. Questions like the following could permeate and humanize the legal process: what is the purpose of the corporate entity and how should it be set up so that it adds to the community rather than undermines it; does it build on ethical and humane values; how will it effect the lives of those it touches; what systems will it relate to; what legal skills have to be mastered to make this project a success? These issues have to be addressed in both legal preparation and assessment.

Schools of architecture, to use another instance, also lend themselves to this "holistic" approach and to the constructive action process. Suppose the architect as part of his or her preparation, had to design within a certain budget aesthetically pleasing, low income housing, supportive of the community in which it is to be located. Such a design would bring into play important environmental issues, income realities of residents, their life styles, the maximizing of site advantages and minimizing of disadvantages, the cultural and ethnic relities as well. Really improving the lives of people would be at the crux of such a constructive action. For education in any of the professional areas as well as in elementary school, high school or college, clarity about purpose is critical. In each professional field, careful planning must be undertaken to determine those major areas which impinge on people's lives, and to structure theory and practice around them. A holistic approach to knowledge, illuminated and defined by the dimensions -- these are the critical distinctions between a new system of education permeated by the service ethic and older forms of the educational process.

Role of Women

Women are in many ways especially well-suited to lead us into the new service society and to create the new kind of education I have just described, an education that is oriented toward social prupose and human values. Women have frequently been cast in a service role by a male-dominated society. They have been selected as mates because they possessed the attributes that made them good at this role: compassion, empathy, social concern. It seems probable to me that this has affected their nature through a subtle process of selective breeding. Men are different from women, but basic biological differences have been reinforced by our stereotyped notions of appropriate feminine roles. Genetically based behavioral differences have been fostered over hundreds of years because men have consciously chosen as mates those women who

epitomized (consciously or unconsciously) the pliant, passive but compassionate soul.

Now, women are coming into their own. Because we are moving to a society where service is paramount and the major arenal for work, the very qualities which attracted men to women as helpmates (but not competitors) -- their gentleness, sympathy, warmth, their motherliness -- are the qualities most needed by a new American society. Characteristics that formerly consigned women to the home now make women uniquely suited to lead us into the future. Men can and will learn them as well as women, but it will take time. Meanwhile, women must take on leadership roles now, and these roles must not be a reflection of traditional male values and male modes of operation.

Those women who unquestioningly accept male standards of leadership, standards patterned on aggression, harshness, ruthlessness, as they enter the labor force are under a delusion. What we need least of all is a group of women executives and political figures who pattern themselves in their quest for success upon the old male model, rather than capitalizing on their own acculturation. To prevent this, education of both men and women must follow the service-oriented model I have proposed.

The existing educational system relects past priorities. Expectations for boys and girls have been different. Men have shaped our institutions and, in the process, defined the roles that women would be allowed to play. Women have accepted this definition and even participated in its perpetuation.

This is beginning to change but simply revising textbooks to eliminate sexual connotations, for example, or providing more equal athletic opportunities, while important, do not constitute basic change. Tinkering with the model -- and that is what we are doing -- will give us only minimal modifications, encouraging for all of us a male-modeled philosophy rather than a humane, new society. Education, after all, ought to reflect the basic concerns goals and

and philosophies of a society. What we need now -- and do not even plan for -- is a reorganization of all learning, from kindergarten through the post-graduate level, which will reflect this new ethos of caring for others. Skills in working with others have to be developed from earliest childhood and must be emphasized at every educational level. When we talk about education and its particular relevance to women and work, we must consider what kind of education 1) best meets the priorities of the new service society; 2) effectively prepares men and women to function positively within that society; 3) operates from a non-sexist orientation, preparing both women and men to perform in common and valued roles, egalitarian in both concept and execution. We must move toward a new educational matrix, new ways of organizing knowledge, a new definition of achievement. Only an education whose elements are totally integrated toward positive performance can meet these criteria.

What we need is a total redesign of education to focus on humaneness, performance and accountability, and this should begin with kindergarten. A new model beginning with early childhood should allow young women -- as well as young men -- to gain, from their earliest days, rewards for positive performance. Both sexes will then learn early in life that while action certainly depends at times on agressiveness, for example, it also depends, at least as much, on compassion, understanding, empathy. Power does not mean force. It means the positive use of a whole spectrum of qualities to improve the human condition. The new educational model must raise to equal importance the qualities to which women have been acculturated, and behaviors that heretofore carried a sexist connotation. Men who have been acculturated and encourgaged to conform to past patterns of behaviors which support dominant roles for men and subservient roles for women -- persons who now hold power within the educational hierarchy, cannot be

counted on to bring out this change of emphasis. This re-design of education is a job for men and women alike, with women taking the lead to begin with until society allows men too to put service ahead of livelihood.

Summary Conclusion

Education for the future has to reflect the learning we believe critical to living in a changing, service-oriented world. It has to reflect the ethos of the service society into which we have already moved. To do this, it must be restructured. Women are an enormous and, as yet, a largely untapped resource in the goal of restructuring education so that it is in harmony with the goals and ideals of our society.. Their backgrounds and acculturation support its philosophic underpinnings.

Economically, our focus has already moved from industry to service. Educationally, however, we have not seen this change. Until we recognize and rectify the anachronism of an educational system based on past priorities and an ethos which is no longer appropriate, we will, as a people, remain in a state of limbo. Tied to a past in education, we cannot make the total leap to an ethos of service, to a society whose highest ideas are cooperation, conservation, equality, respect for each other, sharing and helping one another so that all our lives improve. Such a total reorientation can only occur if the educational system is redesigned to reflect it.

The new model of education described in these pages can make critical difference in how individuals live their lives and what kind of work they can expect to perform. It can bring women to a position of real equality. The new model directly links what we study, what work we can be expected to do, and most important, what ultimately will be the quality of our lives. It presents a heady, but practical vision. It is essential to realize this vision if we are to attain the goals of a service society and lead purposeful, meaningful, satisfying lives.